



DEWEY SQUARE GROUP

**COMMITTEE STRUCTURE PRELIMINARY REPORT**  
**SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL**  
**COUNCIL-MAYOR GOVERNMENT TRANSITION PROCESS**  
**APRIL 12, 2005**

## CHARTER SECTION 270 (E)

*"The Council shall have the right to establish committees of the Council and to establish advisory boards and citizen committees as provided for in Charter section 43."*

### CONSIDERATIONS

As San Diego considers restructuring its Council committee system DSG recommends Council begin with a conversation about the following topics:

1. What is the purpose of committees?

Emphasis on one type of task over others has consequences for the organization of the committee system. DSG wants to weigh this Council's particular needs with its more objective understanding of committee structure in making recommendations. This means it is important for DSG to understand the value that members place on each of the following possibilities:

- Provide a forum for information gathering
- Allow Council as a whole to take advantage of expertise; specialization, and division of labor of its members to improve policy making
  - This function is key for the Council to be able to compete with the professional experience of the Executive bureaucracy
- Build stable coalitions before bringing legislation to the floor
- Offer members added control over selected policy areas that may be of particular concern to their constituents or themselves
- Make the Council's policy making process open to the public

2. How much decision making power should the Council President have? How much decision making power should the committee chairs have?

Inherently there is a tradeoff between efficiency and minority voice. A committee system that creates the most streamlined process for policy making is also a process that is most likely to require dissenting voices to conform to the majority.

When decision making power is dispersed, minority interests tend to be better represented and the policy making process slower. However, the smaller number of people to whom decision making power is delegated, the more efficient the policy process. There are a number of tradeoffs that might be made: more or less authority can be provided to the Council President at the expense or benefit of committee chairs, a majority of the Council, or the Council as a whole. For instance, docketing procedures might be handled completely by the Council President, by the Council President and committee chairs jointly, solely by committee chairs, by a majority vote, or unanimous consent. Or committee chairs might be selected by the Council President, a vote of the committee, a vote of the whole Council, or seniority.

### 3. How will committees be staffed?

Will members rely on their own staff for analysis and support or will the committee have dedicated staff. If committees have permanent staff, who will make the hiring decisions? This could be handled by the Council, City Clerk, Council President, Committee Chair, Committee, or the Office of Analysis. The choice can make the staff member a more or less politicized role. For instance, having the City Clerk or the Office of Analysis determine the staffing will tend to professionalize and insulate the role. Having the Committee Chair or the Council President determine staffing will tend to politicize the role.

### 4. Should all committees be thought of as equals?

Certain committees are likely to handle more politically powerful material. Typically the most important legislative committees are the Budget and Rules committees. These committees are often oversized representing their larger role in the process.

### 5. How many committees should there be?

This question is intimately related to the first point of discussion – the goals that the committees will serve. If, for instance, the goal of committees is to provide each member with policy control this might dictate a large number of committees. Having as many committees as there are members is strategy that some cities (e.g. Los Angeles, Seattle) employ. But this strategy comes at a cost – more potential “veto players.” In other words, the more committees a legislature has, the more people there are in the policy process that can derail legislation. This may have the effect of slowing down the policy making process. Additionally, if there is not enough work for a larger number of committees, inefficiency will be introduced into the process and precious time may be wasted. When there are a smaller number of committees than members, legislators must negotiate with each other for key positions. This negotiation can help to build coalitions, encourage members to be sensitive to each others’ political needs, and inherently means that some members will have less decision making control than others. This may mean that some voters are not as well represented by the system as a whole.

If on the other hand the primary goal of committees is to balance the expertise of the executive branch, committees should be arranged to have clear connections with bureaucratic agencies, and the committees should have strong control over legislation in that policy area (e.g. they should be able to control their calendars and amend legislation).

### 6. How institutionalized should the committees be?

There is a tradeoff between stability and responsiveness. A committee system that is well-entrenched and therefore stable (e.g. consisting of standing committees, with long term appointments, and stable committee staff vs. ad hoc or short term) is also likely to be a system resistant to change.

In general academic evidence suggests that in order for legislatures to take advantage of a division of labor and expertise of different members, the committees should be permanent, have authority in their policy realm, and have control over the docketing process. In other words committees that exist from session to session have permanent staffs, are able to amend legislation, and determine their own agenda generate the most incentives for members to become and remain informed.

Additional considerations for the longer term:

- What will be the process for docketing?
- Will all legislation be referred to a committee?
- Can measures be forced out of committee?
- If a committee reports an ordinance will it automatically come before the whole Council?
- Is there a date after which legislation becomes inactive if not acted upon by committees or Council?
- Should ordinances be approved by the City Attorney prior to introduction?

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

DSG has outlined the main considerations the Council must make to establish a well thought out committee structure. In addition DSG is providing preliminary recommendations based on initial academic and anecdotal research:

- Council President is elected by a majority vote for a 2 year term
  - A Council President may be removed prior to the end of the 2-year term by a majority vote of the Council
- Council President appoints committee chairs, vice-chairs, and members for 2 year terms
  - Committees should have 1 chair, 1 vice-chair and either 2 or 3 additional members
  - This slate should be subject to majority vote
  - Committee assignments can be changed prior to the end of the 2 year term by a 3/4ths vote of the Council
- Budget and Rules committee should be oversized = 5 members (2/3rds of Council)
- 5 Standing committees in total
  - Rules & Openness & Intergovernmental Relations (5 members)
    - Nominations, International Airports, Port District, Interagency/Bi-national and Agreements, City Charter, Telecommunications/Data Processing, Intergovernmental Relations; the Ralph M. Brown Act, Permanent Rules of Council, Public Records Act, Community Right to Know, Accuracy of Government Information, Citizen's Right to Privacy, Consumer Protection, Efficiency and Effectiveness of Government Services
  - Budget & Finance (5 members)
    - Economic Development, Taxes, Fees, Assessments, NTC/BRAC, Labor Relations
  - Land Use & Housing Committee (4 members)

- Affordable Housing, Mobile-homes, Engineering and Development, General Plan Amendments, Subdivisions and Exactions, Community Facility Finance, Annexations, Transportation Planning, Transit Services, Parking Planning, Building Code/Inspection, Land Development/Zoning Code Update, Utilities, Infrastructure Finance, Airport Enterprise Funds and Housing Commission Quarterly Report
- City Operations & Neighborhood Services (4 members)
  - Police, Fire, Paramedics, Neighborhood Parks, Recreation Programs, Youth Services, Senior Services, Neighborhood Revitalization, BIDs, Litter Control, MBE/WBE, Community Development Block Grant, Code Enforcement, Graffiti Abatement, and Parking Regulations and Enforcement
- Natural Resources & Culture Committee (4 members)
  - Clean Water Program, Energy, Water, MSCP, CEQA/NEPA, State and Federal Endangered Species Acts, Arts and Culture, TOT, Solid Waste Disposal, Recycling, APCD/Air Quality, Hazardous Waste, Open Space Planning/Preserves, and Regional Parks
- Council President refers matters (proposed legislation and hearings) to committees
- Committee chairs determine whether and when to calendar matters for the committee's agenda
- Committees may report, amend, continue, or table legislation
  - Legislation can be reported with or without recommendation
- Committees will be appointed 2 staff members (one policy analyst and one fiscal analyst) from the Office of Analysis